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SUBJECT: ANKARA MEDIA REACTION REPORT
TUESDAY, FEBRUARY 21, 2006

In Today's Papers

Turkey-Israel Ties Following the Hamas Visit to Ankara
Hurriyet, Sabah, Milliyet, Radikal, Cumhuriyet, Zaman, Yeni Safak and others: The Israeli Ambassador in Ankara, Pinhas Avivi rejected an offer from Turkish Foreign Ministry (MFA) to brief him on the Hamas delegation visit to Ankara last week. Sabah says that Avivi had refused the briefing because there was no change in the attitudes of Hamas, and that the Turkish initiative had failed. Hurriyet reminds readers that last Friday the MFA had briefed the representatives of the Middle East Quartet -- US Ambassador Ross Wilson, Russian Ambassador Petr Stegnyy, EU term president Austria's Ambassador Marius Calligaris, and UN representative Jacob Simonsen -- on the Hamas visit. Mainstream papers expect new strains in ties between Turkey and Israel while Yeni Safak believes that Israel will not choose to fuel tensions with Ankara. Zaman reports that a delegation of high-level MFA officials will pay a visit to Israel in the second week of March as well as President Sezer who is to visit Israel in June. Zaman also says that the Organization of the Islamic Conference (OIC) is planning to provide financial aid to the Hamas administration, and that Arab foreign ministers discussed in Algeria yesterday sending 50 million USD every month if Israel applies sanctions on Palestine. Meanwhile, papers report Turkish government spokesman Cemil Cicek as telling the press after Monday's cabinet meeting that Turkey conveyed the expectations of the international community to the Hamas officials. Cicek said Turkey had advised Hamas to follow democratic means as they were elected via democratic elections.

Editorials in Turkish papers were almost entirely dedicated to comments on the Hamas visit. Mainstream press continued to argue that this visit did not provide anything positive

for Turkish diplomacy. Characterizing the visit as a match, with the score " Hamas 1, Turkey 0," senior columnist Haluk Ulman wrote in the economic-politic daily Dunya: "Double talk is the most unacceptable mistake in diplomacy, as it poses a serious blow to a country's credibility. Success in foreign policy comes from being reliable as well as trustworthy. Once double talk is used, as the AKP government did on the Hamas issue, it is too late to be credible. Trying to justify this visit by saying that Ankara gave important messages to Hamas is another blow to credibility. Who can possibly believe that Hamas will agree to certain conditions, repeatedly expressed by the US, the EU and the whole international community, just because Turkey has asked them to?"

Focusing on the Hamas leader's current visit to Tehran, columnist Mehmet Y. Yilmaz commented in the mass appeal Hurriyet: "Turkey and Iran have completely opposing views on the Palestine issue. For instance Turkey wants the Palestine administration to recognize Israel while Iran wants Israel to leave the region. The Hamas leader's visit to Iran and his remarks there clearly indicate that the Turkish foreign minister's advice did not work at all. It seems that the visit of Hamas to Ankara will pave the way for many undesired developments for Turkey in near future."

Accusing the critics of being blind, Islamist-oriented Yeni Safak columnist Mehmet Ocaktan argued: "Some still argue that the visit of Hamas will bring trouble for Turkey. They must be suffering from intellectual blindness. What is wrong with the Hamas visit? Turkey's effort regarding Hamas deserves support unless the goal is to push Hamas to more radicalism."

ANKARA 00000835 002 OF 003

While praising the government for its role as a mediator, columnist Hakan Akpınar thinks that the timing was wrong. In the conservative-sensational Tercuman daily, he observed, "This visit was arranged in such an unprofessional way, it ended with damaging consequences for the Turkey-Israel relationship. The important thing in here is not only to diagnose the problem but also to identify proper methods for resolving it. The Palestinian issue is a just cause. It was right for the AKP government to meet with Hamas, but unfortunately, the timing and the method were wrong."

Hamas Visits Tehran, Bolton Calls on Iran to 'Surrender'
All papers cover Hamas leader Mashal's visit to Iran following talks in Ankara, and his remarks in Tehran that Hamas will neither recognize Israel, nor lay down arms. Papers also report that US Ambassador to the United Nations, John Bolton, called on Tehran to follow the Libya example and give up efforts to have nuclear weapons. 'If Tehran does so, problems will be resolved,' Bolton said. Meanwhile, Tehran launched a diplomatic attack with an Iranian delegation paying a second visit to Russia and Foreign Minister Mottaki in Brussels to hold talks. Sabah claims that recent construction work launched in the airport of Turkey's remote eastern province of Mus fueled suspicion that US will use the airport during attacks against Iran.

Rice Postpones Visit to Turkey

Cumhuriyet reports that Secretary Rice will not visit Turkey during her tour of Middle East February 22-24 to explain US policies with regard to Hamas and Iran. The paper speculates that Secretary Rice's visit to Turkey is postponed following Ankara's recent foreign policy moves. A US diplomat told the paper that a visit by Secretary Rice to Turkey will probably happen in mid-Spring.

Alarm in Incirlik for Missile Attack

Sabah: As a result of the intelligence information that Al-Qaida was preparing to attack Incirlik air base with missiles, security measures increased to the highest level in the base. The CIA warned the Turkish intelligence last

week that Al-Qaida militants were preparing to attack the air base with rockets. The base command increased the security system to prevent a possible attack and, at the same time, asked Turkish intelligence and security to find and arrest the militants. All the security units in Adana were alerted.

Kurdish Broadcasts to Begin in March

Hurriyet, Milliyet, Sabah, Zaman, Cumhuriyet and others: After meeting with two local broadcasters from Turkey's mainly Kurdish city of Diyarbakir on Monday, the Turkish Radio and Television High Board (RTUK) said local broadcasts in languages other than Turkish will begin in March. The RUK had released in late 2005 a regulation to allow radio and television broadcasts in Kurdish and other languages in 2006. Twelve radio and television stations had applied to RTUK to broadcast in Kurdish and other dialects; however, the organization did not respond to the demands, citing 'insufficient paper work.' Broadcasters that have completed the necessary paperwork will be given licenses to air programs in languages other than Turkish. TV channels will be allowed to air 45-minutes and radio stations 60 minutes of Kurdish programs a week. The state-owned Turkish Radio-Television Institution (TRT) has been airing programs in Kurdish, Bosnian, Arabic, and Circassian since June 2004.

TV Highlights

ANKARA 00000835 003 OF 003

NTV (8 a.m)

- UNSYG Annan will visit Nicosia following the Greek Cypriot elections this year in an effort to reinstitute talks between the sides in Cyprus. President Papadopoulos, who is to meet with Annan in Vienna today, said he will not discuss the UN-sponsored peace plan, but will ask the UNSYG to send the UN representative to the island as soon as possible.

- Attacks in Iraq claimed 23 lives on Monday. Terrorist attacks on the oil pipelines in the country caused 6 billion USD of damage since the outbreak of war in Iraq.

- Denmark warned Ankara against rallies held in Turkey in protest of the Prophet Muhammad cartoons, saying that the demonstrations were held under the influence of the Taliban.

- The imprisoned al-Qaida ringleader, the Syrian-born terrorist Louai Sakra admitted that he received 50,000 USD from Mullah Omar to attack Israeli cruise liners in Turkey last Summer.

- Secretary Rice tours the Middle East to seek Arab support for US policies toward Iran.

- Saddam Hussein, if found guilty of ordering the killing of 140 people from the town of Dujail, might be executed within months.

WILSON